



CHAIRMAN

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

February 3, 2006

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

I am writing to update you on our progress in implementing the vision for Cooperative Conservation set forth in Executive Order 13352, *Facilitation of Cooperative Conservation*. You have played an integral role in focusing this vision through your participation at the White House Conference on Cooperative Conservation and through your updates and suggestions since the conference. This letter highlights funding in the President's Fiscal Year 2007 (FY07) budget for cooperative conservation initiatives and actions taken by our task force to further cooperative conservation.

First, the President's FY07 budget will sustain Federal tools that contribute to the success of cooperative conservation programs nationwide. Our FY07 budget request also seeks to advance cooperative conservation through innovation and inclusion.

For example, the FY07 budget request includes \$403 million for the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Wetlands Reserve Program, a \$153 million increase over 2006 levels. This program in 2007 will enroll 250,000 new acres, increasing total enrollment to over 2 million acres – an important step toward fulfilling the President's commitment to restoring, improving and protecting at least three million acres of wetlands by 2009. The request also includes nearly \$10 million for a new USDA program that will provide competitive grants for the development of innovative and cooperative approaches to combating the most destructive invasive species.

The FY07 Budget also includes more than \$322 million for programs that emphasize cooperative conservation at the Department of the Interior (DOI). This constitutes an increase of approximately \$9.7 million over the 2006 enacted level. Included in the DOI request is nearly \$75 million for the Department's State and Tribal Wildlife Grants Program. Approximately \$5 million of this amount will fund a new competitive grant program for innovative, collaborative, results-focused projects. In addition to the \$322 million cooperative conservation provisions, the Department's 2007 budget includes \$3 million for the National Fish Habitat Initiative, which is modeled after the successful Joint Ventures Program under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. This constitutes an increase of nearly \$2 million.

Second, the cooperative conservation task force has compiled your suggestions from the conference into a report, "Supplemental Analysis of Day 2 Discussion Sessions." Created in partnership with the Day 2 conference facilitators, the report, available at <http://conservation.ceq.gov/>, identifies a number of short-, mid-, and long-term actions for a more collaborative and efficient Federal workforce, solutions to statutory and regulatory barriers to cooperative conservation, and more effective local involvement in Federal decision-making. Progress is underway on these objectives.

Third, Members of the task force and their agencies continue to make progress on the Federal commitments made at the Conference. For example, task force representatives are working to develop legislation that will establish cooperative conservation as a defining policy approach to environmental and natural resources issues. Work on the EPA's Good Samaritan Initiative is underway to clean up waste from mines in the American Fork Canyon watershed in Utah. USDA is following through on its commitment to maintain and enhance the benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program and is also working to develop a new Market-Based Environmental Stewardship Coordination Council. The Department of Commerce is advancing its Open Rivers Initiative by moving forward with plans to remove a number of small and obsolete barriers to fish passage. I am happy to report that nearly \$6 million is included in the FY07 budget request to get this initiative off to a strong start. In addition, the FY07 request also includes \$10 million for the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. This program compliments the Open Rivers Initiative by empowering partners to reconnect aquatic species to historical habitats and to restore natural water flows through the removal of impediments to fish passage.

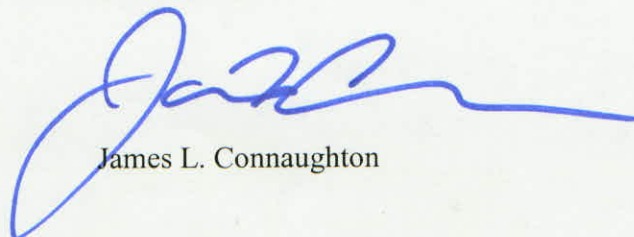
Fourth, based on your recommendations, we are integrating the principles of cooperative conservation into the hiring, training, and rewarding of federal natural resources and environmental employees. On November 28, 2005 Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Director Linda Springer and I issued a Guidance Memorandum directing the Departments of Defense, the Interior, Commerce, Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency to take the steps necessary to hire applicants with proven skills in collaboration, train existing employees in building partnerships, and reward those who demonstrate cooperative conservation skills and initiative. On or before March 31, 2006 each department and agency will submit a report to OPM and the Council on Environmental Quality outlining the specific actions they will take to implement this effort.

Fifth, I recently joined Office of Management and Budget Director Joshua Bolten in issuing a Joint Policy Memorandum on Environmental Conflict Resolution. The Memorandum outlines a number of best practices for conflict prevention and collaborative decision making. It directs Federal agencies to develop and enhance their capacity to effectively implement collaborative problem-solving and environmental conflict resolution approaches. Both of these documents are posted to the cooperative conservation website.

Finally, the Task Force is committed to maintaining communications through the internet. Recently, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) agreed to host, administer and improve the cooperative conservation website. We are currently working with USGS to transform the website into an interactive resource that will facilitate the use of collaborative processes for achieving on the ground results.

Please contact Mitch Butler at mbutler@ceq.eop.gov to share your thoughts on these issues or to request additional information. I look forward to even greater accomplishments as we continue to build on our united commitment to cooperative conservation.

Yours Sincerely,



James L. Connaughton